

Salmonellosis

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is a disease caused by a particular germ (bacteria) called *Salmonella*. It usually affects the bowels (gut). Most infections do not cause medical complications. However, if the *Salmonella* bacteria spreads to the blood it can cause serious illness.

Who gets salmonellosis?

Any person can get salmonellosis, but it is recognized more often in infants and children.

Where are *Salmonella* found?

Salmonella can contaminate raw meats, including chicken, eggs, and unpasteurized milk and cheese products. These bacteria are also found in the feces (stool) of infected persons or pets (e.g., reptiles, chicks, dogs, cats).

How are *Salmonella* bacteria spread?

Salmonella must be swallowed to cause disease. Therefore, it may be spread by eating contaminated food (e.g., eggs and poultry products; fruit; vegetables) that has not been cooked enough to kill the germs, or by drinking contaminated water or milk. Infection can also occur after eating, smoking, or touching the mouth if hands are contaminated with the bacteria and not washed well. Infected persons can spread the bacteria if they do not wash their hands well after going to the bathroom and then they handle food that other people eat. People can also be infected with *Salmonella* if hands are not washed well after contact with sick or seemingly healthy infected animals (especially poultry, pigs, cows, rodents, and pets such as lizards, turtles, chicks, ducklings, dogs, and cats).

What are the signs and symptoms of salmonellosis?

Signs and symptoms include diarrhea (non-bloody), stomach cramps, headache, fever, and sometimes vomiting.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Signs and symptoms occur from 6 hours to 3 days after exposure, but usually within 12-36 hours.

For how long can an infected person carry *Salmonella*?

Most people carry the bacteria for several days to several weeks after illness. A small percentage of infected persons can carry the bacteria for a year or longer.

Do people infected with *Salmonella* need to be excluded from work or school?

People who have diarrhea should not work as foodhandlers, or provide care for children or patients. Children who have diarrhea should not go to childcare. Most infected people may return to work or school when diarrhea stops, provided that they are careful to wash their hands after using the toilet. In some situations, people who may be carrying *Salmonella* may need to be excluded from high-risk environments until they have no *Salmonella* in their stool.

What is the treatment for salmonellosis?

Most people with salmonellosis recover on their own. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics and anti-diarrhea drugs are generally not recommended for mild-moderate cases.

How can salmonellosis be prevented?

- Wash hands carefully before and after food preparation and after toileting or changing diapers.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked eggs (or foods made with raw eggs), poultry, and meats. Always treat raw poultry, beef, pork, and egg products as if they were contaminated. Avoid drinking raw milk.
- Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent fluids from dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize holding at room temperature.
- Disinfect food cutting boards, counters, and utensils after each use (1 tsp. liquid household bleach per gallon of water is effective - prepare the bleach solution fresh daily). Do not rinse. Let air dry.
- Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, especially when using a microwave.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables prior to eating or chopping.
- Avoid chicks, ducklings, and turtles and other reptiles as pets for small children.